



BILINGUAL WORKERS?

In some organisations there is considerable confusion about what defines a bilingual worker. One theory advocates that a bilingual worker can be a staff member who has language skills in English and another language, whilst others claim that it is someone specifically hired to work in two languages.

The more important issue is to define the role of the bilingual staff member in each organisation and be able to differentiate between a "bilingual professional" who provides direct services in LOTE (language other than English) and a bilingual staff member who occasionally assists clients in LOTE or provides communication support to colleagues who are monolingual.

Preferred definition of a Bilingual worker:

A person employed to use their language skills in English and another language with a linguistic proficiency in both languages appropriate to the function of their position who also understands and shares the values of the non-English speaking background community they are employed to work with and their employing agency.

Models of a Bilingual Worker

Bilingual workers and or staff are employed or classified as "bilingual" on the basis that they have :

1. proficiency in two languages;
2. biculturalism; and,
3. bilingualism and/or biculturalism forming identified employment criteria.

Bilingual worker as interpreter

In this role a bilingual worker performs two communication roles:

1. direct one-to-one encounter with a client who speaks the same language;
2. three-way encounter between provider, client and bilingual worker.

Bilingual worker as one-to-one worker

In this role, the worker is explicitly recruited for both their bilingual and other relevant professional skills. Their language ability is not incidental or preferred but a core component of their employment.

Bilingual worker as group educator and information provider

In this role workers are hired as community educators and are recruited for their bilingual skills then trained in both presentation and content by their employer or contracting agency.

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